

The Vermont School Readiness Series

Early Care & Education Workforce

Caring for Caregivers

In large part, children thrive to the extent that their parents and other caregivers are doing well. If we want young children to be well prepared for school—emotionally and socially, physically and intellectually—then we must take care of those who nurture young children. These are neighbors, employees, employers, and customers in our communities.

Parents, of course, are children's first and most significant caregivers. While all parents want to provide the best for their children, few parents today can do so on their own. Parents rely on support of many kinds—from children's grandparents, to community-based providers of childcare, to government credits, to employers, friends, and neighbors. Some provide occasional advice or help, while others may provide more ongoing help with childcare, meeting expenses, arranging transportation, or meeting children's health needs.

Today, most young children in Vermont are in non-parental care for some part of a typical week. In

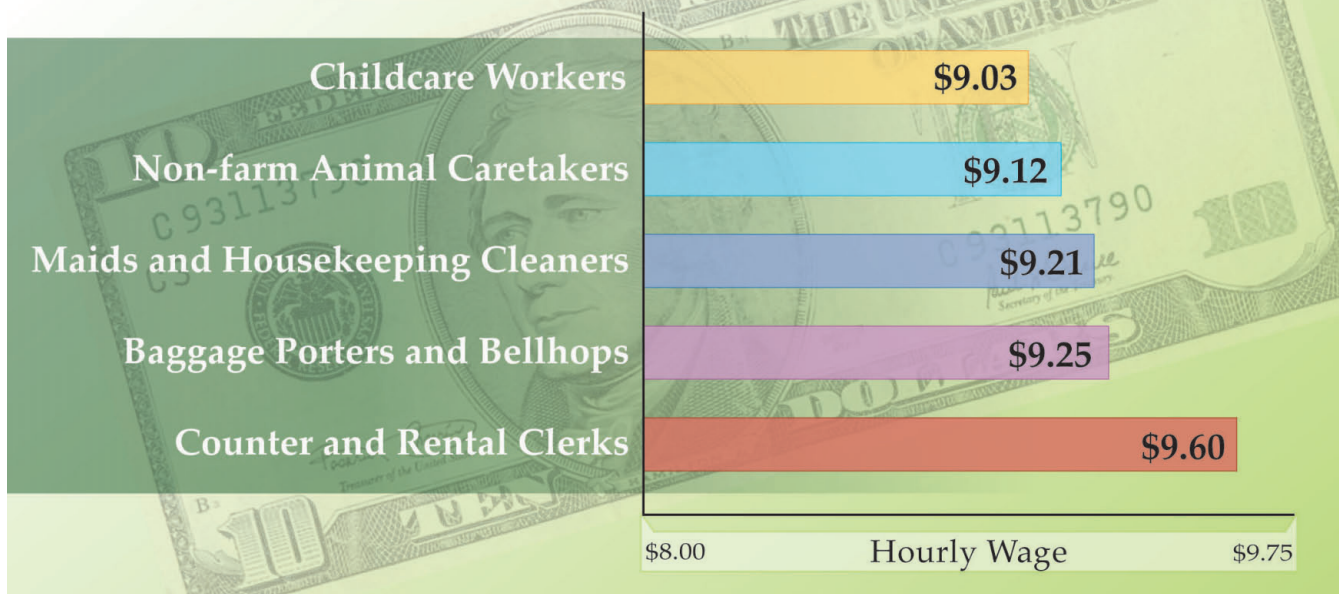
2003, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, 70 percent of Vermont children under six years old had both parents (or one, if living with a single parent) in the labor force.¹ While non-parental childcare is an economic necessity for many families, the main reason parents have their children in preschool, a national study finds, is for the educational opportunities it provides. Research confirms their view, for high-quality early care and education does improve children's readiness for school.²

Paying for childcare is a big piece of many families' budgets—often accounting for the largest portion after housing costs, and food.³ However, many working parents in Vermont do not earn a "livable" wage that adequately covers the cost of childcare, along with other necessary expenses.⁴ The consequences can be dangerous for young children, who may be left unsupervised or in poor-quality care.

As hard-pressed as many parents are, paid caregivers as a group are one of the lowest-paid occupations.⁵ It's remarkable that we entrust our most precious resources to those who earn, on average, less than parking lot attendants.

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Average Wage of Childcare Workers vs. Other Occupations Vermont, 2003



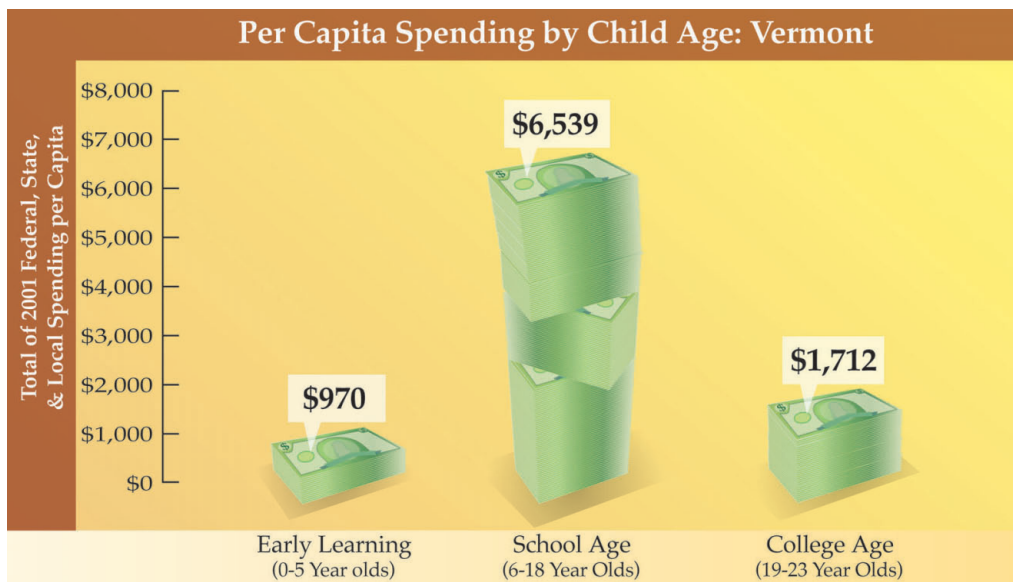
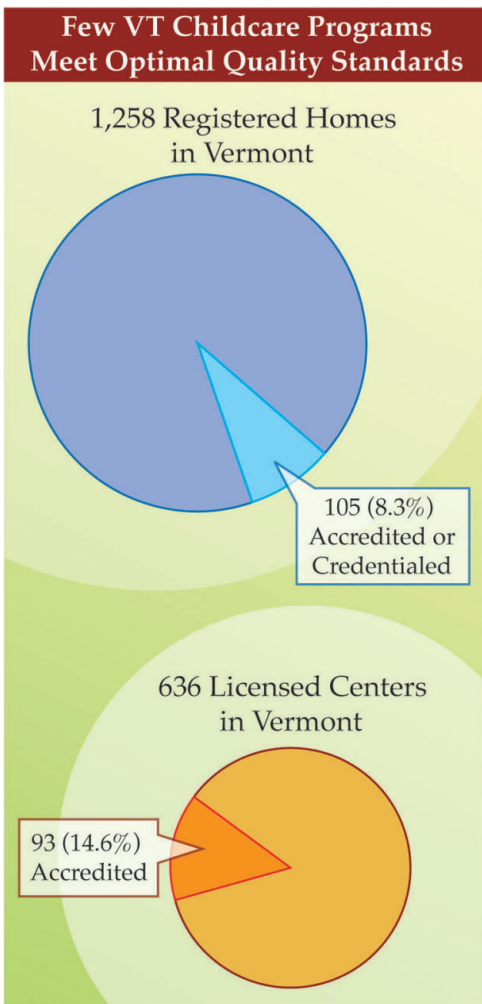
Because the childcare profession^a is so poorly paid, and typically offers few job benefits, there is frequent turnover—a situation that is damaging for young children who rely on the presence of consistent, caring adults for their sense of security. In addition, economic pressures may lead to inadequate staff-to-child ratios, and low educational qualifications for caregivers, both of which have been found to lead to poor-quality care that can be detrimental to children’s well-being.⁶

We cannot address the quality of childcare—which can make the difference between an experience that enhances children’s development and readiness for school, and one that damages children—without addressing how we support the early care and education workforce (including parents).

High-quality childcare is an outstanding investment: Dozens of reports cite the benefits—to children, their families, and society—that come in the form of increased academic success, fewer behavioral problems, and lower reliance on public assistance, particularly for the most disadvantaged families.⁷ However, few Vermont childcare settings meet recognized standards of high quality.⁸

Why is this? The short answer is that our public investments in early care and education are tiny compared, for example, to the public spending we allocate to K-12 and post-secondary education.⁹ Given our knowledge of brain development, which is largely formed before age 6, as well as the expense associated with remedial education, there is something wrong with this picture! Our spending priorities reflect outdated knowledge and outmoded family circumstances. We don’t suggest reducing our commitment to later education, but bringing our early investments more in line with the realities of development.

Moreover, by investing more in early care and education we strengthen the already significant contributions the childcare industry makes to Vermont. A report produced in 2002 detailed the economic impact of this sector, in producing jobs, in sustaining jobs of working parents, and in direct purchasing of goods and services. When parents have dependable, good-quality childcare, they are more productive at work, and have less absenteeism, so their employers benefit.¹⁰



^a We include here preschool teachers, family childcare providers, family support workers, and personal care attendants, among others.

What Can You Do?

- Support parents who choose to stay home to care for their children, as well as those who choose non-parental care.
- Support more public funding for high-quality childcare, comparable to our state and nation's contributions to grade-school and post-secondary education.
- Support a "livable" wage in Vermont, so that parents and other caregivers can make ends meet.
- Talk with employers about the importance of quality childcare for their current employees, and for the community's next generation.
- Learn more about what childcare workers do (it's not "babysitting"), and show your appreciation.

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For More Information:

Child Care Fund of Vermont

www.storyofachild.org

Child Development Division, Department for Children & Families

(802) 241-2131

www.state.vt.us/srs/childcare

The Economic Impact of Vermont's Child Care Industry

Produced by the Windham Child Care Association, and the Peace & Justice Center

www.windhamchildcare.org

Vermont Livable Wage Campaign

(802) 863-2345 x8, or www.vtlivablewage.org

Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children

(802) 655-0982



- 1 U.S. Census Bureau. 2003 American Community Survey.
- 2 Barnett WS, and Yarosz DJ. Who goes to preschool and why does it matter? National Institute of Early Education Research. New Brunswick, NJ, 2004.
- 3 Giannarelli L, and Barsimantov J. Child care expenses of America's families. The Urban Institute. Washington, DC, 2000.
- 4 Vermont General Assembly, The Joint Fiscal Office. Basic needs budgets and the minimum wage. Montpelier, VT, 2005.
- 5 Vermont Department of Employment and Training. November 2003 Statewide Occupational Wage Estimates. Occupational Employment Statistics survey. October 2004.
- 6 Shonkoff JP, and Phillips DA (Eds.). From neurons to neighborhoods: The science of early childhood development. National Academy Press. Washington, DC, 2000.
- 7 Lynch RG. Exceptional returns: Economic, fiscal, and social benefits of investment in early childhood development. Economic Policy Institute. Washington, DC, 2004. Shonkoff JP, and Phillips DA (ibid.).
- 8 Vermont Department for Children and Families, Child Care Services Division. The Vermont Child Care Advisory Board's 2004 Legislative Report. Waterbury, VT, 2004.
- 9 Bruner C, Elias V, Stein D, and Schaefer S. Early learning left out: An examination of public investments in education and development by child age. Voices for America's Children, and Child and Family Policy Center. Washington, DC, and Des Moines, IA, 2004.
- 10 Windham Child Care Association, and Peace & Justice Center. The economic impact of Vermont's child care industry. Brattleboro, VT, and Burlington, VT, 2002.

School Readiness Series:

What Do We Know?

Children's readiness for kindergarten
Schools' readiness for children

Are Our Young Children Healthy?

Children who are overweight or at risk
Health factors affecting learning

Families With Special Challenges

Children living in poverty
Domestic violence and substance abuse
Incarceration of parents
Refugees

Social-Emotional Development

Behavioral/emotional development
Interaction with other students
Challenges for teachers

Children With Special Needs

Who are children with special needs?
Support information

The Workforce in Early Care & Education

Caring for caregivers
Paid caregivers
Investing in quality childcare

The School Readiness Series is one of several research initiatives currently supported by the Vermont Research Partnership. Too many children enter kindergarten with physical, social, emotional and cognitive limitations that could have been minimized or eliminated through early attention to child and family needs. States are developing comprehensive school readiness indicator systems, a necessity to sustain current investments in the most effective programs for children and to make the case for increased investments to improve outcomes for young children and their families. Vermont's School Readiness Series strives to communicate that "readiness" is a shared responsibility of families, schools and communities. The Series provides fundamental school readiness indicators and resources for additional information about what can be done to help young Vermonters make the most of school.

The Vermont Research Partnership was established in 1998 as a collaborative between the Agency of Human Services, the Department of Education, and the University of Vermont. The Partnership's primary objective is to study and improve the effectiveness of community-based initiatives undertaken by these three parties. The Vermont Research Partnership develops shared research agendas on topics of particular importance for enhancing policies and practices that affect children, youth, and families. Projects engage the diverse perspectives of researchers, program directors, practitioners, and community members from across the state.



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